

Lesson 21 A. Classy classifications. The story of Panini. Part 1.

This lesson is classified as "Read Only.....building up on general knowledge."

No one said that a marriage is easy-going. It gets tougher when one-fourth of the words your brand new husband speaks, go above your head. Here i was, all set to enter my new home, and i was told, " तुगलँ व्हाणे हांग्ग दवरी ।"

i understood most of the sentence....i was being asked to keep my something in the place pointed out to me.....but the crucial "something" was the mystery. What in the world were व्हाणे s ?

Ah! Thank the good Lord that people often use their eyes to speak as well! In a second, i figured that a व्हाण was the ubiquitous slipper...चप्पल । Badgi-vocabulary is a trifle different from the Tenki one. (For the benefit of my Non Chitrapur-Saraswat friends...us Chitrapur-Saraswats are affectionately "classified" as बड्गी s from North Kanara and तेङ्की s from South Kanara.) So with the help of my Pappamma, my father's mother, i compiled a synonym-dictionary of sorts to help ease my transition into a Tenki household. Now, years down the aisle, i slip from one tongue to the other with the ease of an eel.

i can betcha bottom dollar that our Panini....Sanskrit Grammarian par excellence... had a similar problem. People all over Bharatvarsha spoke the language, but often the vocabulary used was slightly different. If i said केमुण्डाँ (watermelon in Konkani) , the guy in the next district would say बचङ्ग (ditto).... and only confusion would prevail if ever the twain did meet.

Before Panini, many tried their hand at getting this spoken language to conform to rules, and they did a good job too....but none managed to make it as perfect as Panini did. (The word Sanskrit itself means that which has been systematized.)

Good ol' Panini, God bless his soul, being extremely sensitive to people's feelings, so no group would feel left out, and wanting to see everybody live happily ever after together, decided to act Pappamma, and brought all of them together under the aegis of "Sanskrit." He toured all over Bharatvarsha , noted every word used and put it all down on paper. Then he

classified the words. AND HOW!!! (To his credit ...he studied all existing grammar works and in his own work, has very religiously and faithfully accounted other grammarians' thoughts on the subject under discussion.)

He classified nouns depending on the gender and on what it ends with ..whether a vowel or a consonant. So we have a पुंलिङ्ग , स्त्रीलिङ्ग and a नपुंसकलिङ्ग । And we have a अ, आ, इ, ई, उ, ऊ ,ऋ, त्, इन् ,अन्, अस्, etc. ending gender classified nouns. And we have pronouns classified into the three genders.

With nouns and pronouns done, he shifted his attention to the verbs. He tried to figure out what to do with the groups of people saying, " अहं नमामि " and those saying, "अहं वन्दे ।" Both meant, " I am doing namaskaar" in the present tense. (Just as the Badgis would say पळ् and the Tenkis चौड़ for the word "look".....this may not be an accurate example of two separate verb groups like the नमामि and वन्दे ..for to be absolutely honest, only a few isolated words in Konkani are so different.....but it does give an idea of what i'm trying to convey. Or at least, i hope it does!) Traditionally, the नमामि group of verbs are called परस्मैपद , henceforth referred to as P.P. and the वन्दे group of verbs, आत्मनेपद , henceforth referred to as A.P.

Here is a preview of how the आत्मनेपद is conjugated in the present tense.

वन्द् (वन्दते -to do namaskaar)लट् लकार

पुरुष Person	एकवचन Singular	द्विवचन Dual	बहुवचन Plural
प्रथम	सः/ सा / तत् वन्दते	तौ/ ते /ते वन्दते	ते/ ताः/तानि वन्दन्ते
मध्यम	त्वं वन्दसे	युवां वन्दथे	यूयं वन्दध्वे
उत्तम	अहं वन्दे	आवां वन्दावहे	वयं वन्दामहे

Back to our story... Panini did not want to let a single verb disappear into oblivion. So he put them all together and began to study them deeply. He

started to look for similarities and then came across another mind-bender. There were a few verbs that took both forms...for example भज् - worship, which became both भजति and भजते | He named this group of verbs उभयपद (U.P.) . The P.P., and the A.P. and the U.P. put together would make the language richer.

So far, in our lessons, i have only introduced to you the P.P. verbs. In the next few lessons, now that you are aware that A.P. and U.P. verbs exist as well, we will learn them all simultaneously. Piece of cake! Not to worry! Slow and steady....we'll beat the tortoise yet!

A hauntingly lost concept:

There is another school of thought that believes that special attention must be paid to the original meaning of the words "परस्मैपद "and "आत्मनेपद."

The word परः means " others" and the word आत्मन् means " oneself." It is thought that the परस्मैपद group of verbs were used when the result of the action was for others and the आत्मनेपद group of verbs, when the result of the action was only for oneself. There were enough verbs in both sets to cover this beautiful concept. Let me give you an example of an उभयपद धातु , to explain what i mean...पच् is an उभयपद धातु। It is conjugated both as पचति and पचते । When Mother cooks, she obviously cooks for the entire family. Therefore, माता पचति । A Yati (sanyasi) would need to cook only for himself. Therefore, यतिः पचते ।

As the years passed, this original concept of a single person using both forms at different times to mean different things, was lost. Two separate groups of people emerged and they each adopted the two different styles of speech. Panini came much later to bring it all together again. But by then, the original distinctive use had given way to a more democratic "freedom of expression"...and now माता पचति and माता पचते had begun to mean the same.

Once Panini's work became known to the people, the Sanskrit Badgis and the Tenkis of the days gone by became familiar with each other's vocabulary and very soon a mixture of the two became a single , common medium of communication. Much like my kids speak today! It is pretty natural to come across a sentence like अहं मन्दिरं गच्छामि, देवं वन्दे च ।

Heartwarming note: Most of the verbs we use are परस्मैपद (P.P.), but a few very important ones are आत्मनेपद (A.P.). Both these groups must be studied simultaneously. Here's a good reason to learn the A.P. lot. How would we understand a bhajan like this one without knowing the A.P.?

1. वन्देऽहं (वन्दे अहं) गुरु- शङ्कर -चरणम् or for that matter...
2. श्री कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् । or for that matter...
3. वेदव्यासं भजे देशिकाधीश्वरम् (अहं भजे...worship.) HmMMM???

When i know that i am the one doing the namaskaar or the worship, doesn't it strengthen my personal involvement in the bhajan ?

Now you will understand the meaning of our National Song.... वन्दे मातरम्
.... it is i who am doing namaskaar to my motherland. Before i began my study of Sanskrit, i always thought that the national song had to be sung in a group. Now i'm older and wiser...

The History of a Language is tremendously interesting. And that of the most ancient one of all, even more so. This particular lesson triggered in me the need to read more about our ancient past. Whenever i come across fascinating bits, i'll send them over to you.

Now a look at Part 2 for further insights into Panini's work.
